

"I used to think I was invincible, like Superman," says JaQue, shown here on the field at Pasadena City College. "Then I got hurt, and it was a big injury. I learned not to take life for granted."

TRUE TEEN STORY



Vocabulary

artery: a tube that carries blood from the heart to all the other parts of the body

amputate: to cut off all or part of someone's leg or arm

prosthetic: describes a device that replaces a missing part of the body

recruited: got a person to join

enrolled: registered, signed up to join

Back in the Game

JaQue lost his lower leg, but he never lost his fighting spirit. Now he's living out his dream of playing college football.

Sports were always an integral part of JaQue Billingsley's life: He excelled at numerous sports—baseball, basketball, track and field—but his primary passion was football.

In 2010, JaQue, then 14, started ninth grade in his hometown of Warner Robins, Georgia. To stay fit for football, he joined the wrestling team—but during a practice, something went horribly wrong.

While wrestling with a teammate, JaQue injured his knee. Initially, doctors believed he had just fractured a bone—but in reality, an important **artery** in JaQue's leg had been severed.

JaQue was hospitalized for months, and doctors had to **amputate** his right leg below the knee. They informed JaQue that he'd been incredibly fortunate: He'd survived a potentially fatal injury.

What Next?

A difficult recovery lay ahead, but JaQue faced it with

determination: "I took it on as a challenge," he explains.

Following weeks of therapy, JaQue began using a **prosthetic** leg. "I felt like a baby, because I had to learn how to walk again," he remembers, adding, "Being my size, it was like walking on a stilt."

One goal kept JaQue motivated: "I was determined to get back out and play football," he remembers. His coach and teammates visited him, offering encouragement

and inspiration.

JaQue returned to school in a wheelchair—but he quickly became comfortable using his prosthetic leg and got back on the football field.

Power and Pride

JaQue's school had a top-ranked football team. As an amputee, would he be able to play at such a competitive level?

JaQue demonstrated his determination and ability, quickly becoming

During football practice, JaQue wears a protective covering over his prosthetic leg.



one of the team's most valuable members.

He played the defensive position of nose guard, which requires unimaginable power. "He's as strong as an ox," stated one of his admiring coaches.

In addition, JaQue participated in wheelchair basketball, wheelchair football, and competitive power weightlifting for people with disabilities.

After the amputation, JaQue sometimes tried to pretend that nothing was different, but that made him feel terrible. Eventually, "I just accepted the fact that I am an amputee," he explains, adding, "That felt so much better."

JaQue has a motto that has motivated him: "Don't try to be something you're not—just be the best you can be."

To play wheelchair basketball, JaQue learned how to spin, turn, and speed down the court in a specially designed sports wheelchair.



The Next Level

JaQue's best has proven to be remarkable: Now 18, he holds a world record for power weightlifting—a record he set on August 6 at an international competition for athletes with disabilities, lifting an incredible 184 kilograms (406 pounds). He hopes to compete in the 2016 Paralympics.

During his senior year of high school, coaches **recruited** JaQue to play football for Pasadena City College in California. He **enrolled** there this fall.

On the Pasadena team, JaQue doesn't receive any preferential treatment: Indeed, the team's head coach, Fred Fimbres, recruited JaQue without knowing about his injury.

Fimbres had seen a video of JaQue playing football and was impressed. He saw no evidence of JaQue's disability on the video. By the time the information reached him, Fimbres had already decided to recruit JaQue.

"I want to win some football games," explains Fimbres. "JaQue can play! He is not here for any other reason." JaQue wouldn't have it any other way.

—Sarah Jane Brian

This summer, JaQue set a world record in power weightlifting.

